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ABSTRACT

An ethnographic study investigated four adult beginning reading (ABR) classes in several adult learning centers in order to determine the effect of an adult's age and developmental phase on his or her behavior and attitudes in the learning-to-read process. For 9 months, a four-member research team conducted on-site observations, compiled extensive field notes, and correlated data from sources such as project proposals, adult learning center newsletters, ABR teachers and students, adult education students and teachers, and staff of the Virginia State Department of Education. After developing snapshots and sketches of 14 adults for over 60 adult beginning readers, researchers concluded that no relationship existed among age, phase of adult consciousness and adult development, dominant motivation, and reading behaviors. The study supported the postulate that both growth expansion and anxiety frustration can serve as the dominant motivation for beginning to read. Because the researchers found such wide variations among phases of adult development and adult consciousness, they recommended that adult beginning readers be given both group and individual instruction. (MN)

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ADULT DEVELOPMENT AND ADULT BEGINNING READING BEHAVIORS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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Abstract

Adult Development and Adult Beginning Reading Behaviors: An Exploratory Study

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In a nine-month ethnographic study of four adult beginning reading classes in several adult learning centers, two research questions were investigated: 1) do differences in ages from the teens through the forties indicate differences in adult development among adult beginning readers (ABR's) and 2) how does the developmental phase of an adult effect his/her behavior and attitudes in the learning-to-read process? There was no relationship of age, phases of adult consciousness and adult development, dominate motivation, and reading behaviors.

This study suggests that the age of an adult is insufficient for identifying the phase of adult development or adult consciousness among ABR's. Adult beginning readers have more variability than that found by Gould (1978) or Levinson (1978). This study supports Kuhlen's (1968) postulate that both growth-expansion and anxiety-frustration can serve as the dominate motivation for beginning-to-read. Implications for instruction and further research are suggested.

ADULT DEVELOPMENT AND ADULT BEGINNING READING BEHAVIORS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

Sally Schumacher, Ph.D.

One of the most striking observations of adult beginning reading classes is the wide range of ages found in a single instructional situation. In a nine-month ethnographic study of four adult beginning reading classes in several adult learning centers, two research questions were investigated: 1) do differences in ages from the teens through the forties indicate differences in adult development among adult beginning readers (ABR's) and 2) how does the developmental phase of an adult effect his/her behaviors and attitudes in the learning-to-read process? The study suggests implications for effective instruction and further research.

Behaviors and attitudes were analyzed with the conceptual frameworks of adult consciousness (Gould, 1978), adult development (Levinson, 1978, and Tittle and Denker, 1980), and life span developmental psychology (Neugarten, 1968, and Kuhlen, 1968). The findings qualitatively related the phase of adult consciousness and adult development among these adults to the dominate motivation for learning-to-read behaviors. Four types of reading behaviors emerged from the data: inconsistent, minimal, regressive, and progressive.

ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODOLODY

Data were collected, using ethnography (Schumacher, 1979, 1981) by a research team for An Ethnographic Study of Adult Beginning Readers Project, funded by the Adult Education Services of the Virginia Department of Education. Ethnography in this study has three characteristics: 1) a case study design which focused on the learning-to-read process of adults in beginning reading instructional situations, 2) qualitative analysis of the multiple sources and kinds of data, and 3) field research to observe more directly the complexity of reality without reactive effects and threats to internal validity often associated with experimental control and manipulation of treatments. Ethnographic procedures involved selecting and training a research team, gaining access and acceptance in the field, holding weekly staff meetings and seminars to identify multiple research roles and evolving foci, and establishing a valid data base. Validity of the data base was achieved by nine months of on-site observations, extensive field notes by a four member research team, and use of multiple methods, participants, situations, and organizations. Below is a summary of the sources of data used in a qualitative cross-validation of the findings.

Multiple methods	observations; casual conversations; focused interviews; methods testing; active engagement in role of tutor, assistant, or teacher
	documents: centers' newspapers and announcements, project proposal, attendance cards, enrollment forms, State ABE newsletters

Multiple participants	center directors, ABR teachers, ABR students, adult education teachers, adult education students, State Department of Education officials
Multiple situations	research team staff meetings, centers' administrative offices, centers' classrooms, centers' testing rooms
Multiple organizations	State Department of Education; university; public school systems

Data was presented as Adult Snapshots and Adult Sketches (Boraks and Schumacher, 1981 Chapter 5). Fourteen adults were selected from over 60 ABR's observed in the ABR classes for this analysis. Ethnographic data were sufficiently indepth to identify reading behavior and attitude patterns and adult developmental phases. An Adult Snapshot combined several sources of data from observations of the instructional process. An Adult Sketch analyzed the adult from the conceptual frameworks. Sources of the data for the Adult Sketch were: enrollment records; interviews with teachers, tutors, and staff; conversations with the adult; observations during the academic year; and the periodic research team discussions of each adult.

FINDINGS

The findings are summarized in the chart below (Boraks and Schumacher, 1981, p. 230). The chart is the reference point for this discussion. All names have been coded.

Insert Chart
About Here

1. Two distinct phases of adult consciousness (Gould, 1978) emerged among these 14 adults. Both males and females, aged 18 to 25 years, were working on developmental tasks found in ages 16-22 in Gould's study. The older adults, ages 27-43, were working on developmental tasks found in ages 28-34, with two exceptions. Carol, 27, and Patrick, 42, seemed to concentrate on the tasks found in ages 22 to 28. Among these adults, aged 18-43, three phases of adult consciousness were discovered, with most adults trying to resolve childhood assumptions found operating at ages 16-22 and 28-43.

2. A second pattern among these adults appear in the phases of adult development as suggested by Levinson's study (1978) and Tittle and Denker's (1980) synthesis of research. Among these adults aged 18-43, three developmental phases are evident: Early Adult Transition, Entering the Adult World, and the Thirties Transition. Generally, the younger group had more variance.

ADULT DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL READING BEHAVIORS OF ABRS

Name & Age	Adult Consciousness (Gould, 1978)	Adult Development Men (Levinson, 1978)	Adult Development Women (Tittle & Denker, 1980)	Dominant Motivation (Kuhlen, 1968)	General Reading Behaviors
Jim, 18	16-22 tasks	Early Adult Transition	N.A. (not applicable)	Anxiety goal diffused	inconsistent
Betsy, 21	16-22 tasks	N.A.	Premarriage	Anxiety goal diffused	minimal
Lonnie, 22	16-22 tasks	Early Adult Transition	N.A.	Growth-expansion	regressive
Rick, 22	16-22 tasks	Entering the Adult World	N.A.	Growth-expansion	progressive
Mike, 23	16-22 tasks	Entering the Adult World	N.A.	Growth-expansion	progressive
Casey, 23	16-22 tasks	Early Adult Transition	N.A.	Anxiety	minimal
Joan, 25	16-22 tasks	N.A.	Premarriage	Anxiety	progressive
Carol, 27	22-28 tasks	N.A.	Multiple roles	Anxiety	minimal
Horace, 27	28-34 tasks	Thirties Transition	N.A.	Anxiety	minimal
Carl, 27	28-34 tasks	Thirties Transition	N.A.	Growth-expansion	minimal
Joy, 32	28-34 tasks	Thirties Transition	Multiple roles	Growth-expansion	progressive
Alice, 35	28-34 tasks	N.A.	Multiple roles	Anxiety	regressive
Patrick, 42	22-28 tasks	Thirties Transition	N.A.	Anxiety	minimal
Annie, 43	28-34 tasks	Thirties Transition	Multiple roles	Growth/Anxiety	inconsistent

3. A third pattern is the difference between men and women in adult development. Tittle and Denker's review of the research (1980) suggests that theories of adult development based on research on men do not account for the phases of adult development found in women. The data confirm Tittle and Denker's interpretation for the younger group, but raise further questions for the older group of women. In the younger group, the behaviors of Betsy, 18, and Joan, 25, did not fit most of the developmental tasks Levinson found in his sample of 40 men. Betsy and Joan, both exhibiting similar phases of adult consciousness, could best be described as in a premarriage period, with expectations that marriage would be a full-time occupation. However, all of the older group of women--consisting of Carol, 27, Joy, 32, Alice, 35, and Annie, 43--demonstrated multiple roles and conflicts among the roles of spouse, parent, worker, and student, as suggested by Tittle and Denker. Two women, Joy and Annie, also exhibited behavior in the Thirties Transition which Levinson found in his study of men. These two women, in their decision to enter a basic reading program, were trying to "better themselves," i.e., to acquire skills that could ultimately result in a change of life structure--or, as Levinson put it, another season of life. Levinson found that all members of his male volunteer sample progressed through adult phases in order. The findings in this study suggest that some beginning adult women readers can experience a Thirties Transition in which forming a dream, developing mentor relationships, establishing an occupational goal, and changing love relationships are interpreted in terms of an educational goal, i.e., learning to read.

4. The phase of adult consciousness relates in general to the phase of adult development. There is more variance among the younger adults (18-25), whose adult consciousness was challenging the omnipotence of parents and forming identity. Some of the younger adults were in the Early Adult Transition, and some had Entered Adult World by making initial choices to build a life structure. The older adults--with two exceptions (Carol, 27, and Patrick, 42)--were in the Thirties Transition and simultaneously resolving the adult consciousness tasks associated with ages 28 to 34.

5. An important finding not reflected in the Chart is the complexity within the phases of adult consciousness and adult development. In an attempt to find patterns, the researcher analyzed the dominant tasks of each adult within each phase. Thus, the three adults who were Entering the Adult World were working on different developmental tasks. A similar pattern was found among the five adults in the Thirties Transition. This pattern was also found when using the components of the childhood assumptions to identify the phase of adult consciousness.

6. There is no pattern in the relationship of age, adult consciousness, adult development, and dominant motivation for learning-to-read. The dominant motivation of anxiety and frustration occurred in all phases of adult consciousness and adult development. Further, the dominant motivation became more frustrating. This is not surprising, since the longer the adult attended the class, the more reality-based became his or her assessment of the requirements to meet the original goal of learning-to-read.

7. There was no pattern in the relationship of age, phase of adult consciousness, phase of adult development, dominant motivation, and reading behaviors in the group. These adults exhibited four kinds of general behavior in learning to read: inconsistent, minimal, progressive, and regressive. Inconsistent behavior occurred in two phases of adult consciousness and in three phases of adult development. Regressive behavior occurred in two phases of adult consciousness and in two phases of adult development.

In summary, the concepts of phases of adult consciousness, phases of adult development, and dominant motivation are not directly related to the general reading behaviors of these adults as a group. Other variables that might directly affect reading behaviors were hypothesized, such as the materials and the teaching procedures. It is hypothesized that the tasks of adult consciousness and adult development affect teacher decision-making about materials and teaching procedures, which in turn might affect reading achievement directly.

However, when the analysis is shifted from the group to the individual, then a relationship between the developmental task of a phase and reading behaviors provides more explanatory power. When learning-to-read was an integral part of a developmental task of an adult, the adult showed progressive reading behaviors. When learning to read was not a major focus of a developmental task, the adult exhibited inconsistent, minimal, or regressive reading behaviors. Further, in resolving a developmental task in which reading was central, an adult could exhibit a growth-expansion or an anxiety-frustration motivation.

This study suggests that the age of an adult is not enough to identify the phase of adult development or adult consciousness. Adult beginning readers have more variability than was found by Gould (1978) or Levinson (1978), whose participants were adult readers. Women's adult development among these beginning readers differs qualitatively from men's adult development, as hypothesized by Tittle and Denker (1980). Further, this study supports Kuhlen's (1968) postulate that both growth-expansion and anxiety-frustration can serve as the dominant motivation in a developmental task related to reading.

Perhaps this analysis illustrates the conclusion of Robert C. Peck (1968) in discussing the use of developmental criteria rather than age criteria for the study of phases in later life:

> There is a greater variability in the chronological age at which a given psychological crisis arises in later life, than is true of the crisis-points of youth . . . . In studying children, at the pre-pubertal stage, we can almost take it for granted that they are almost working on the same total set of developmental tasks. With adults, the pattern of developmental tasks can vary more greatly, from one individual to another. (Peck, 1968, p. 92.)

IMPLICATIONS

Recognizing the limitations of ethnographic research and the exploratory nature of the study, what are the implications for instruction?

1. Knowledge of the general phase of adult consciousness and adult development can provide the adult reading teacher with a deeper understanding of the behaviors that a beginning adult reader exhibits in the learning-to-read process. The age of an adult provides one indicator of phase of adult development or consciousness, but other information is needed. In addition, the developmental phases of women appear to differ from those of men.

2. An understanding of the behaviors related to adult development may aid a teacher in making decisions related to materials and instructional procedures. A teacher decides which adult behaviors are responded to and reinforced and which behaviors are ignored. A teacher could relate the importance of learning-to-read to an individual's developmental task. A teacher may be able to recognize more easily the adult's "readiness to learn" and the "teachable moment" (Havinghurst, 1961). Through this approach a teacher may foster attitudes and behaviors that promote attendance and achievement.

3. It is important to identify whether the dominant motivation for learning-to-read is anxiety-frustration or growth-expansion. A teacher's procedure with a student motivated by anxiety-frustration would differ from his or her procedure with a student motivated by growth-expansion. One of the keys to helping adults learn-to-read is knowing how much frustration each student can handle.

4. Because of the wide variations among phases of adult development and adult consciousness, it seems beneficial that adults receive both group instruction and individual instruction. However, many factors will influence the allocation of instructional time (Merizow, Darkenwald, and Knox, 1975; Bowren and Zintz, 1977; Karnes, Ginn, and Maddox, 1980).

The findings of this study suggest tentative implications for further research.

1. There may be greater variability in adult consciousness among adult beginning readers than was found in Gould's study (1978) of patients and nonpatients, male and female. Because Gould's findings in patients were verified by survey research, the results are relevant for reading adults.

2. There may be greater variability in male adult development among adult beginning readers than was found in Levinson's study (1978) of 40 men. Although not all of the men in his research graduated from high school, it is implied that all of them could read.

3. Female adult development differs qualitatively from male adult development among ABRs. This finding supports those of Tittle and Denker (1980). Further research in vocational development among women ABRs is needed.

4. This study supports Kuhlen's (1968) postulate that anxiety-frustration can serve as a dominant motivation in adult development.

5. The phase of adult consciousness among these ABRs parallel the phases of adult development with some exceptions.

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